

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-22 (Canceled)

~~23.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that encodes a polypeptide comprising amino acid residues 111 to 181 of SEQ ID NO:49, wherein the polypeptide binds to caspase-1.

~~24.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that encodes a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:49.

25. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 24, wherein the polypeptide consists of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:49.

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26. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 24, wherein the nucleotide sequence comprises SEQ ID NO:48.

27. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 24, wherein the nucleotide sequence comprises SEQ ID NO:50.

~~28.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that encodes a polypeptide comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 85% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO:49, wherein the polypeptide stimulates NF-kB activity.

29. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 28, wherein the amino acid sequence is at least 95% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO:49.

30. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 29, wherein the amino acid sequence is at least 98% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO:49.

~~31.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that encodes a polypeptide comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 85% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO:49, wherein the polypeptide binds to caspase-1.

32. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 31, wherein the amino acid sequence is at least 95% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO:49.

33. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 32, wherein the amino acid sequence is at least 98% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO:49.

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~~34.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that hybridizes to SEQ ID NO:50 or the complete complement thereof under conditions of hybridization at 45°C in 6.0 X sodium chloride/sodium citrate (SSC) followed by washing in 0.2 X SSC, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) at 65°C, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide that stimulates NF-kB activity.

35. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 34, wherein the nucleic acid comprises at least 600 nucleotides.

~~36.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that hybridizes to SEQ ID NO:50 or the complete complement thereof under conditions of hybridization at 45°C in 6.0 X SSC followed by washing in 0.2 X SSC, 0.1% SDS at 65°C, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide that binds to caspase-1.

37. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 36, wherein the nucleic acid comprises at least 600 nucleotides.

38. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 23, further comprising a sequence encoding a heterologous polypeptide.

39. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 24, further comprising a sequence encoding a heterologous polypeptide.

40. (New) An expression vector comprising the nucleic acid of claim 23.

41. (New) A host cell comprising the expression vector of claim 40.

42. (New) The host cell of claim 41, which is a mammalian host cell.

43. (New) A method for producing a polypeptide, the method comprising culturing the host cell of claim 42 under conditions in which the nucleic acid is expressed.

44. (New) An expression vector comprising the nucleic acid of claim 28.

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45. (New) A host cell comprising the expression vector of claim 44.

46. (New) The host cell of claim 45, which is a mammalian host cell.

47. (New) A method for producing a polypeptide, the method comprising culturing the host cell of claim 46 under conditions in which the nucleic acid is expressed.

48. (New) An expression vector comprising the nucleic acid of claim 31.

49. (New) A host cell comprising the expression vector of claim 48.

50. (New) The host cell of claim 49, which is a mammalian host cell.

51. (New) A method for producing a polypeptide, the method comprising culturing the host cell of claim 50 under conditions in which the nucleic acid is expressed.

~~52.~~ (New) An isolated nucleic acid selected from the group consisting of:

a) a nucleic acid comprising the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC) as Accession Number PTA-213, or the complete complement of the nucleic acid;

b) a nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence which encodes a polypeptide comprising an amino acid sequence encoded by the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213;

(c) a nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that hybridizes to the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213 or the complete complement thereof under conditions of hybridization at 45°C in 6.0 X sodium chloride/sodium citrate (SSC) followed by washing in 0.2 X SSC, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) at 65°C, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide that stimulates NF-kB activity; and

A' (d) a nucleic acid comprising a nucleotide sequence that hybridizes to the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213 or the complete complement thereof under conditions of hybridization at 45°C in 6.0 X sodium chloride/sodium citrate (SSC) followed by washing in 0.2 X SSC, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) at 65°C, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide that binds to caspase-1.

53. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 52, wherein the nucleic acid comprises the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213, or the complete complement of the nucleic acid.

54. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 52, wherein the nucleic acid comprises a nucleotide sequence which encodes a polypeptide comprising an amino acid sequence encoded by the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213.

55. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 52, wherein the nucleic acid comprises a nucleotide sequence that hybridizes to the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213 or the complete complement thereof under conditions of hybridization at 45°C in 6.0 X sodium chloride/sodium citrate (SSC) followed by washing in

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0.2 X SSC, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) at 65°C, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide that stimulates NF-kB activity.

A 56. (New) The nucleic acid of claim 52, wherein the nucleic acid comprises a nucleotide sequence that hybridizes to the cDNA insert of the plasmid EpHC5 deposited with the ATCC as Accession Number PTA-213 or the complete complement thereof under conditions of hybridization at 45°C in 6.0 X sodium chloride/sodium citrate (SSC) followed by washing in 0.2 X SSC, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) at 65°C, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide that binds to caspase-1.
